

Sam: Can you just start by telling me a little about your special ed program and what it is that you do?

Bush: well you know 504s are not special ed. So, there two different plans two different sets of laws. Are you interested in 504s?

Sam: maybe just start by telling me what you do. What's your job?

Bush: I'm the administrator over student support so I'm over the person who does the 504 plans, I'm over special education, the health office, mental health services. For the most part that's what I do and then anything else that goes wrong.

Sam: So, looking at the numbers and we've looked at a number of different high schools, Palisades seems to have, starting in 2011 the percentage of students with 504 plans was about three and a half, and between then and 2015 it got up to about eight and a half. So, we were wondering if you could give your opinion on why that was?

Bush: I think it just became more widely known, a lot of that also correlated to college testing. College board and ACT requiring the school to verify accommodations. So, I think part of that rise came because of the college entrance exams put more of the onus on schools when they used to do those things themselves. And I think people just being more educated about accommodation plans.

Sam: Ok, so there is just a follow up question for that. The national average is somewhere around 2.5-3 percent of students. So, Palisades is a bit of an outlier being at 8 percent. We don't have the numbers for 2018 but based on the 2015 numbers why would you say that Palisades has such a high rate of 504 plans when compared to other schools?

Bush: You know, I don't know. I think that we follow the district policy. We have a lot of private school kids who come in with accommodation plans from their private schools that we honor. And we just get a lot of requests. Many of our requests are due to mental health disorders, hospitalization, so we're very proactive when a student is hospitalized making sure when they come back, they have support. So that results in a 504 plan. Again, all the private school kids who come back to public school for high school, many of them have accommodation plans. We inherit them through the district, we're chartered through LAUSD, so a lot of our feeder schools are LAUSD schools. The district's policy is very loose, and we are pretty much required through the district to provide a plan every time a disability is suspected. I agree, we have an awful lot of them, and I think part of that comes from the parents in our residency area being highly educated. We also reach out when we know a student is having a health issue, or mental health issue, we reach out to provide accommodations as well.

Sam: in your opinion, how scrutinizing is the high school about whether or not a student is requiring,...For example, if someone comes in and says 'I need accommodations for this or that,' does the school do a proper job scrutinizing those claims and whether or not someone should be getting the 504 plans or is it pretty liberal as far as who gets them and what not.

Bush: You know, we follow the district policy like I said, so if someone requests a section 504 sometimes it comes from doctors sometimes it comes from mental health providers, sometimes it comes from our parents, there is a process. Sometimes there's a teacher questioner that we send out to the teachers to look at how the student is doing in their classes. Often times we are finding that teachers are providing accommodations informally and once we collect the data from the teachers and we have a reasonable belief that the student have a disability we schedule a team meeting and that's where everyone comes together, the student, the teachers, the 504 case manager and they determine if the student needs accommodations to access the curriculum basically. Or the school campus and then 2 what accommodations would be needed if they do need them.

Sam: I'm sure you don't know the exact breakdown of who has what, but in your experience are most of these 504 plans given to children because of ADHD, is there a particular diagnosis that makes up the majority of the 504 cases in Palisades?

Bush: Many have ADHD, many have anxiety disorders or depression. Some have concussions, some have health disorders like diabetes. So, we really have a wide breadth, but those are the disabilities that come to mind.

Sam: So how big of a driver would you say getting these accommodations on the ACT/SAT are? If you could maybe dive into that a little bit more and just explain that sort of thing for me.

Bush: You know, there are certainly some parents where it really does look like they're just trying to pave the way for extended time on a college test. I think most of ours are legitimate because we are seeing issues with the students. But with any kind of an access issue, some people take advantage. But I think the majority of our students do need the accommodations we are providing them.

Sam: A thing that we're looking at, a general trend across LA and America is that wealthier districts tend to have 504 plans at a higher rate than those in poorer areas. For example, Palisades has a high 504 plan rating, Compton has a lower one. This is kind of a macro question, but do you have any idea why that might be?

Bush: Absolutely I do. I think that parents hire advocates and attorneys when they have the means to afford their child any opportunities and unfortunately students from the other areas don't have that luxury. So, I do see that that's happening. We have students who are traveling, and we try to be fair so that everyone has an opportunity. That's why we will refer if we know of any difficulties. I think that SES status makes a big difference.

Sam: You mentioned attorneys. Is there every any legal issues with denying a kid a 504 plan?

Bush: Oh sure.

Sam: Can you maybe talk about why having access to attorneys can make a difference?

Bush: Since we're a school chartered through LAUSD, if a parent or an attorney calls the district to complain, they come back to us and we need to follow up and do what we need to do and so we do that. But that's not really very many to be honest. I can probably count on one hand the number of situations that that applies to. I think we get more requests because our public tends to be more knowledgeable about that even though our councilors are very knowledgeable and lead families in our direction, or the health office does regardless of what their status is. I don't think that's a huge percentage, but we certainly have that every year.